

# THE ISSUE

... it is clear that a portion of the funds expended by the National Science Foundation should be used to strengthen the weaker, but promising, colleges and universities, and thus to increase our total scientific potential. (*Science and Public Policy* (The Steelman Report): Part One—Science for the Nation, IV. A National Science Program, p.34. 1947)

Competing perspectives and national policies on the geographic and institutional distribution patterns for federal academic research awards have existed since at least the onset of the post-World War II social contract between the federal government and America's research universities. ("Policy Agendas and the Distribution of Federal Academic R&D Awards," paper

presented by Irwin Feller at the Association for Policy Analysts and Management Annual Research Conference, November 4, 1999)

Federal science policy has long sought to strike a balance between supporting the best academic research proposals and nurturing the development of talent in all locations.<sup>1</sup> The former tends to be institutionally concentrated; the latter is distributed across many universities and colleges. The longstanding concern about this inherent tension is well illustrated by these two quotations, separated by nearly half a century. The issue has engendered periodic discussions about the institutional distribution of Federal funds for all academic science and engineering (S&E) and for research and development (R&D).

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<sup>1</sup> The National Science Foundation Act of 1950, creating the Foundation, states, "[I]t shall be an objective of the Foundation to strengthen research and education in the sciences, including independent research by individuals, throughout the United States, and to avoid undue concentration of such research and education."